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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that teachers' beliefs and attitudes affect not only their instructional decisions and human relationships, but also their willingness to seek professional knowledge, particularly when such knowledge contradicts their beliefs. Results obtained from a case study on K-5 staff development through inquiry are used to illustrate what is considered a pervasive situation. Findings reveal that teachers tended to confuse a strategy or practice with beliefs and that they differed greatly in their views of theory and research and views of teaching and learning. After two years of participation in the study, several teachers commented that interpersonal skills, something seldom taught in teacher education programs, appeared to improve among the staff, suggesting that open-mindedness, empathy, and honest communication were not evident among the participating teachers when the study first began. It is concluded that professional knowledge must include interpersonal skill training as well as research based knowledge. The challenge is to find out how to link knowledge and practice, to convince the public to pay for this career-long staff development, and to persuade teachers that this prolonged training is vital. If teachers are to play a strong role in the current knowledge-oriented society, they must be highly skilled in interpersonal interactions themselves before they can teach it to their students. (Contains 23 references.) (NAV)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INQUIRY:

OPENING A PANDORA'S BOX OF TEACHER BELIEFS

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Staff Development Through Inquiry:

Opening a Pandora's Box of Teacher Beliefs

Pandora's Myth

Once upon a time in Ancient Greece, Zeus commissioned the creation of the first woman and invited the gods to bestow gifts upon her. Formed in the image of Aphrodite, this beautiful creature was called Pandora (Gift of All). She was sent to live among mortals with the warning never to open a particular box in her house. Day after day, Pandora looked at the box, wanting to know what could be inside. At last, overcome by curiosity, she lifted the lid. Out swarmed all manner of misery hitherto unknown to mortals -- Sadness, Jealousy, Anger, Greed, Vanity, Malice -- spreading quickly throughout the world. Horrified by the contents of the box, Pandora clapped down the lid, just in time to keep the only good gift from flying out -- Zeus's gift of Hope.

Pandora's myth has recurred in various forms throughout western history. We recognize it in the biblical story of Adam and Eve,[1] both unable to resist the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We also recognize traces of the myth in Goethe's (1808) famous legend of Faust who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge.[2] Unlike earlier versions of Faust[3] but similar to the mythical and biblical conclusions, Goethe chose a redemptive ending for Faust.

Updating Pandora's Myth

The Pandora myth and related stories instruct us that while knowledge has

been highly desirable since the dawn of human beings, it comes with a price. With our nation presently in an "age of social transformation," Drucker (1994) predicts that knowledge will become the most valued currency of the future and that "knowledge workers" will need to function in teams rather than as individuals. The role of schools and teachers in a knowledge-oriented society, he believes, will need to be reexamined.

Schools cannot divorce themselves from their public. If Drucker's (1994) predictions about a knowledge-oriented society prove accurate (and we're already seeing the writing on the wall), then schools will need to focus not only on academic knowledge but also on supportive social skills. Teachers will have to practice what they teach, so they too will need both professional and interpersonal knowledge and skills.

In the past, we have essentially relied on workshops or graduate courses as a source of knowledge for classroom teachers. In the future, that will not be adequate since "knowing about" something is not equivalent to "knowing how" to do it well; skills (especially interpersonal skills) depend on lengthy practice in real settings. The new paradigm of staff development has been touted as a new means for sharing knowledge and simultaneously encouraging teacher inquiry, collaboration, and team work. While I applaud this shift and the desired ends, it seems to me that educators are asking teachers to change without providing the knowledge and tools to do the job. This change is a replay of earlier attempts to make teachers accountable without providing the knowledge and tools for helping them move

from beliefs and opinions to supported, defensible judgments. We have forgotten the message in Pandora's myth: When we open the box of staff development through inquiry, differing beliefs and conflicts will come out; and while increasing teachers' professional and interpersonal knowledge is desirable, we must remember that changing beliefs and behaviors is a long-term process with a price tag.

This paper will illustrate that teachers' beliefs and attitudes affect not only their instructional decisions and human relationships, but also their willingness to seek professional knowledge, especially if it counteracts their beliefs. I will argue that if today's teachers are to play a strong role in a knowledge-oriented society that requires mature interactions among adult employees ("people skills"), then teachers must be highly skilled in these areas themselves before they can teach them to their students, the knowledge workers of the future.

While some teachers already excel in both professional and interpersonal knowledge and skills (Collinson, 1996), teachers in general do not have a tradition of systematic exposure to continuous professional knowledge or a record of working collaboratively with colleagues for school improvement ("seeing the big picture"). When we ask teachers to model continuous learning, to share their knowledge, and to work together productively, we ought not delude ourselves that it will happen out of a vacuum or that it will happen without exacting a price.

Throughout the paper, I will refer to results of a case study on staff development through inquiry. But the case study is simply illustrative of a much more widespread and pervasive situation. Hoping for change is not enough.

Teacher education can no longer afford to rely on teachers' haphazard, individualized acquisition of professional knowledge. Sustained staff development through inquiry is one way of systematically structuring continuous learning of professional knowledge for teachers, but it must also include on-going knowledge and practice of interpersonal skills.

The Role of Beliefs in Inquiry and Teaching

The ancient Greek inscription at Delphi, "Know thyself," indicates that knowing and articulating one's own beliefs has a long history of being a fundamental tool of successful social adaptation (Heath, 1994; Jesild, 1955; Redl & Wattenberg, 1959). And given that teaching depends on human interactions, it is surely no accident that the understanding of self and others has also been linked to good teaching (Heath, 1994; Waller, 1965; Westerhoff, 1987; Willie & Howey, 1980).

The idea behind staff development through inquiry is "to alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understandings of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1983, p. 2) through a systematic, collaborative process of teacher inquiry. Collaborative inquiry, operationally defined by Sirotnik (1988), is

> . . . a process of self-study -- of generating and acting upon knowledge, in context, by and for the people who use it. . . . Critical methods are based upon conscious, systematic, and rigorous human discourse wherein (1) values, beliefs, interests, and ideologies in the educational setting are made explicit; (2) the need for information is generated; and

(3) actions are taken, critically reviewed, retaken, and so forth. (pp. 169-170)

Teachers' beliefs are linked to their instructional decisions: Guskey (1986) contends that beliefs about teaching and instructional practices derive from classroom experiences; at the same time, consciously or not, teachers' decisions about instruction reflect their beliefs, attitudes, and values (e.g., Fenstermacher, 1986; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Yet it is through discourse, not just practice, that beliefs are made explicit (Sirotnik, 1988). Beliefs can change to defensible judgments through examination, supportive evidence, and systematic inquiry (Dewey, 1933/1960). While discourse and inquiry have the capacity to expose beliefs about curriculum and instruction and while resulting knowledge can be used to shape or revise current and future practices, the process works best when teachers also know and practice successful interpersonal skills.

An Illustrative Case Study

The school in this case study recently decided to engage in a long-term project of school improvement using a model of staff development through inquiry. The teachers have currently completed the first two years of the project and deserve commendation for their risk-taking, perseverance, and hard work.

During the first year of the project, eight teachers volunteered to present an overview of their "best practices" such as problem-based inquiry in science, the reading/writing workshop process, and interdisciplinary curriculum. The teachers'

presentations were a catalyst for a semi-structured staff discussion that included two questions about beliefs: What are the beliefs underlying the teaching practices in the presentation? and How is the practice positioned in relation to individual beliefs about teaching and learning? Students were released early once a month to ensure a minimum of at least 90 minutes of uninterrupted time for this staff development project. The first year meetings were tape recorded, then transcribed verbatim. Additionally, the researcher and a teacher kept field notes.

At the beginning of the second year, the staff requested and got one full release day per month for staff development, permitting an in-depth examination of the K-5 core curriculum (language arts, science, math, social studies) to identify key concepts and find ways to integrate disciplines. Data collection during the second year included researcher observations, researcher and teacher field notes, an audiotaped staff session of oral assessments of the two years, and individually written teacher reflections about their beliefs concerning teaching and learning.

Shared Beliefs

During the first year, as part of the staff development discussions that followed individual presentations, teachers tried to tease out the beliefs behind their colleagues' best practices. This was a hard task at first and one that required practice throughout the year. At the beginning of the second year, a group of teachers and the principal examined the transcripts of the first year's meetings in search of shared beliefs. The tendency of the group was to confuse a strategy or practice (e.g., "Teachers communicate a lot with parents") with a belief (e.g., "Parents are partners

in learning"). By first finding strategies that most teachers use, the group was able to identify six beliefs:

- chronological age and a child's development in various areas are not synonymous
- learning is an individual, lifelong process
- all children can learn
- environments affect learning
- children and teachers are *both* teachers and learners
- parents are partners in learning.

When these beliefs were presented to the staff, a large majority of staff members endorsed them. Of course, not all of the teachers envision these beliefs in the same way given their varying backgrounds of knowledge and experience in teaching. However, this kind of inquiry can clarify shared beliefs, provide a foundation for discussing why teachers make certain decisions, and encourage inquiry into whether these beliefs are coherent and emphasized in actual practice. Shared beliefs can also contribute to a mission statement or goals for a school, act as a source of common ground during disputes, and communicate to parents what the school stands for.

Teacher Beliefs: Sources of Division

Although the teachers agreed on certain beliefs, there were two very divisive issues that were apparent to me but that the staff did not openly articulate. The issues involved teachers' views of theory/research and teachers' views of

teaching/learning.

Differing views of theory/research.

Since teachers' beliefs and attitudes about research and learning influence the educational decisions they make, these beliefs also ultimately affect the vitality and self-renewal capacity of the school as an organization. Research- or data-based decisions, along with continuous learning, are hallmarks of healthy learning organizations (Gardner, 1963/1981; Senge, 1990) and of knowledge workers (Drucker, 1994). Determining a staff's beliefs and attitudes toward research is one important indicator of a school's capacity for growth, professional judgment, and accountability.

Dewey (1933/1960) observed that beliefs are formed by tradition, instruction, and imitation. Beliefs are "prejudgments, not conclusions reached as the result of personal mental activity, such as observing, collecting, and examining evidence. Even when they happen to be correct, their correctness is a matter of accident as far as the person who entertains them is concerned" (p. 7). Research is quite different from beliefs in that it represents systematic inquiry and analysis based on knowledge available at the time.

During individual teachers' presentations of best practice in the first year of the staff development project, I asked the presenters for research-based support of their best practices. The presenters were well informed and knowledgeable about research in their area of specialization. They were comfortable about providing evidence supporting their thinking and they were willing to share it with

colleagues. As we worked through our curriculum inquiry during the second year, one subcommittee recognized how helpful the results could be in describing the school curriculum to parents. Various teachers also wrote in their assessment of the two-year project that "research to help make decisions is important" and "a guide in developing skills as a teacher."

It was near the end of the second year of the project when a question about the school's multi-age (looping) policy was raised. Imagine my excitement when a teacher said, "What does the research say?" To prepare for staff inquiry around this issue, four teachers, the principal, and I provided research-based articles indicating pros and cons of multi-age grouping. I selected the jigsaw technique followed by a whole group discussion to facilitate a meeting the principal had arranged to get the staff to publicly discuss the issue and come to a carefully supported decision. What followed made me realize that the differing views about theory/research among staff members were more contentious than I had guessed.

In a jigsaw, each teacher is responsible for reporting the content of the particular article they read. Each group ends up hearing a report of all of the articles. As I finished explaining the jigsaw process, several teachers opposed to multi-age grouping assumed (without evidence) that I was pro multi-age grouping and issued a barrage of questions and comments: "Are you here to tell us what to do?" "Are you sure the articles give *both* sides?" "You're asking us to suspend judgment and not give our opinions [during the reporting phase], but some of us have *very* strong opinions!"

I sat with one of the groups during their reports. One reporter with an article that did not match her beliefs misrepresented the author. Another said, "Why should I believe anything these old guys dream up in the ivory tower?" The same teacher later referred to the meeting as "high falutin' theory." My own experience and the literature about the theory/practice gap suggest that this staff is not unique in representing a continuum ranging from teachers open to and in the habit of staying up-to-date with theory/research to teachers who close it off as a source of knowledge or basis for informed decisions. But the incident raised some questions: How do leaders begin to open minds that are closed or opposed to research? How will teachers who close their minds to current knowledge be able to teach in a knowledge-oriented society? How long can we overlook instructional decisions made on personal preferences, especially if the results mean inconsistent or limited practices for students?

Differing views of teaching/learning.

Differing beliefs about teaching/learning were also evident, producing tensions between adherents of behaviorist and constructivist paradigms. There were several teachers who not only understood the differences between the competing paradigms, but who also knew their own position and the reasons for it. Others felt the tension between their personal views of teaching/learning and the state's new mandates that more tightly prescribed curriculum and increased standardized testing, but they did not have specific vocabulary to describe what they felt.

The differences between the competing views became more noticeable when, after examining the K-5 curriculum, the staff sat down to put the courses of study into practice. The two groups' vocabulary was noticeably different: "cover the curriculum" versus "integrate the curriculum;" "list of objectives" versus "key concepts;" "straight grades" versus "finding the kid's level;" "Just tell us what to do and we'll do it" versus "Here's an integrated web on 'Structures' that our team made."

Constructivism is currently the dominant paradigm as evidenced, for example, by recent national standards for mathematics, beginning teachers, and staff development. Schools may, however, be caught between the new paradigm and state policies that are incompatible. In this particular case study, the majority of the staff could be described as constructivists frustrated by a state legislature that continues to define student achievement by standardized test scores, has increased the number of standardized tests per student, and has more tightly prescribed and narrowed the curriculum.

However, some teachers on this staff who still have one foot in the behaviorist paradigm believe that the most sensible action is to "teach to the test" using old practices and straight grades for convenience. They worry about being "able to cover everything" and feel the pressure of having their teaching performance determined by their class's test scores. At the same time, they accomodate the shared beliefs the staff identified, though the two belief systems are not compatible. Articulating beliefs is only the beginning of a long process and it is

not a silver bullet for avoiding disagreements, but it can at least contribute to understanding one's own beliefs, bringing differences into the open, and beginning the process of inquiry into teachers' instructional decisions and practices.

Working Together to Understand Differences of Beliefs

Since relationships and interactions with students, colleagues, and parents are part of being a teacher, we might expect that interpersonal knowledge and skills would be part of every teacher's repertoire. However, these skills are rarely included in continuing teacher education though they take a long time to develop and require coaching and practice.

In the teachers' assessments following their two years of staff development, several comments indicated that interpersonal skills were improving although they were not an explicit initial goal of the project. One teacher wrote that "the staff seems to be better at listening to each other's ideas" while another said:

> I think we learned how to discuss things as a staff. I think we listened better to what people were saying. You know, sometimes we react to things rather than to listen to things and I think we learned to listen to each other and respect others' opinions or knowledge. But I think there was definitely a growth in our discussion.

Despite some successes, conflicts are inevitable in change efforts (Fullan, 1991). The inability to recognize the real issue or problem (on this staff, fundamental differences of beliefs and attitudes), as well as inability to deal with differences among adults, flies in the face of effective learning and human

interactions on several counts. Fundamental requirements of successful interactions with others include open-mindedness, empathy, and honest communication.

Open-Mindedness.

Open-mindedness is a key attribute of learners (Gardner, 1963/1981) and an important attitude necessary for good thinking (Dewey, 1933/1960). Open-mindedness "includes an active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to facts from whatever source they come; to give full attention to alternative possibilities; to recognize the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us" (p. 30).

Open-minded learners engage in inquiry, long associated with self-renewal (Gardner, 1963/1981) and increased flexibility in the face of change and uncertainty (Dewey, 1933/1960). One teacher realized that knowing other teachers' strengths and their willingness to help colleagues is important: "Using teachers as resources makes teaching all the subjects less overwhelming because the curriculum now seems more manageable." Another recognized that "an atmosphere that welcomes differing perspectives is important" for stimulating and challenging her thinking. In schools, supposedly places of learning where teachers model good habits of thinking and inquiry, open-mindedness should be a major goal for teachers, not just for students. Closing off discussions, sources of evidence or knowledge, and the examination of beliefs makes learning very difficult and allows beliefs that cannot be supported to remain unchallenged. Staff development through inquiry begins to

establish a forum for opening up discussions around substantive issues of teaching/learning.

Empathy.

Second, learning and good relations call for empathy. "Empathy requires enough calm and receptivity so that the subtle signals of feeling from another person can be received . . . . This makes it easy . . . to recognize and respond fittingly to people's feelings and concerns -- the art of relationship. Such people make good 'team players' . . . or can be excellent teachers" (Goleman, 1995, pp. 104, 118). While rapport and caring about *students* are emphasized in teacher preparation, empathic skills with *adults* are generally left to chance for the remainder of teachers' careers, even though helpful, collaborative relationships with colleagues and parents are associated with healthy, successful schools (Heath, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989).

The following account illustrates what can happen when open-mindedness and empathy are ignored. One day, as two teachers holding different views about teaching/learning were trying to work together, I heard Teacher A say to Teacher B, "What would you know anyway? You're not even in the classroom." Teacher B, while currently not assigned a class, has years of classroom experience in a wide variety of grades and settings. She is very active as an instructional leader at the school and district level. I watched her pain as this equivalent of "Shut up!" silenced her knowledge contribution to the group. Other teachers brushed off the incident as "a personality conflict."

This is not an isolated incident in this school or elsewhere; I have often heard teachers say something similar in schools (usually about principals or professors) and I routinely hear it from my practitioner graduate students. It is as though years of learning through experience in the classroom are suddenly erased. By the same token, if students' years of learning in classrooms were wiped out by virtue of their leaving school, teachers would be out of a job and society would still be in the Stone Age.

These kinds of illogical, ad hominem attacks might look like "personality conflicts" because they attack the person, not the issue. However, since beliefs and knowledge are so strongly linked to who we are and to our ego, personal attacks hurt very deeply -- a point rarely missed by users who want to hurt or silence an opponent, cut off a reasoned discussion or a search for common ground, or divert attention from facts or evidence. It is a "grown-up" version of the kindergarten child I saw clinch a disagreement by yelling at his little partner, "And your mother's ugly and fat too!" Such comments are neither relevant to the issue nor helpful in resolving the dispute. But instead of brushing them off or ignoring them, we ought to be defining the real issue and asking why the discussion slid from the professional to the personal level in the first place.

Honest, open communication.

Finally, good communication skills are associated with honesty and trust, both vital to productive interactions. Teachers in many schools can still function in relative privacy and choose not to work with colleagues on substantive issues of

school improvement. Thus, they do not have to articulate their beliefs, give supported reasons for their instructional decisions, or learn to interact diplomatically with other adults. The latter is particularly evident where teachers do not see the school as a unit or as a holistic learning organization for students.

Instead of learning to deal constructively with disagreements or conflict with adults, teachers who function as individuals instead of as members of a collective can dodge disagreement by avoidance or by not publicly saying what they think and why they think it. This is not to say that their opinions go unexpressed. Instead, the expression often occurs behind the scenes or in parking lot meetings. "Parking lot meetings or 'meetings after the meeting' are typical when participants . . . have difficulty with one another, don't trust each other, and have lots of hidden agendas -- ideas and thoughts that are not shared openly. These behaviors and attitudes impede the productivity of the group" (Koehn 1994, p. 3).

What is frightening is that if some teachers have difficulty identifying beliefs under calm circumstances like staff development sessions, they may not know their own hidden agendas. This opens the possibility of their functioning at an emotional level and of being "flooded" by feelings that result in predictable patterns of unproductive behavior (see Goleman, 1995). The good news is that interpersonal skills can be developed. Indeed, some teachers already have remarkable skill in dealing with colleagues, parents, and administrators.

Summary

In this paper, I have argued that professional knowledge must be supported

with interpersonal knowledge and skills if teachers are to be able to teach well in a knowledge-oriented society. But teachers will only learn interpersonal skills and develop the necessary accompanying attitude (open-mindedness) and dispositions (empathy and trust) if they are persuaded that strong interpersonal skills and research-based knowledge can enhance their teaching and workplace environment; if intensive, long-term development and coaching are provided; and if continuous learning of professional and interpersonal knowledge and skills is linked to what it means to be a teacher (e.g., personal improvement plans or teacher performance evaluations).

The challenge is to find ways to link knowledge and practice, convince the public to pay for career-long staff development, and persuade some teachers that the comfortable pew is not acceptable. If teacher education persists in emphasizing only professional knowledge without supporting it with interpersonal knowledge, and if schools continue to support teachers who resist continuous learning and team work, public schooling as we know it may not enjoy the happy ending of the Pandora myth or the Faustian legend. A knowledge-oriented society would demand continuously high levels of professional and interpersonal proficiency among teachers. With a public that has "already reached the limit of [its] ability to let school systems try to reform themselves from within" (Kohl, as cited in Frankel, 1995), the price of the human quest for knowledge in the 21st century remains to be determined.

Footnotes

[1]Also see the Qur'anic version, especially Sura VII.

[2]Goethe's *Faust* spawned numerous works: Liszt's (1854-57) orchestral masterpiece, *Symphony after Goethe's Faust;* Gounod's (1859) opera, *Faust,* and ballet (1860); Berlioz's (1893) opera, *La damnation de Faust;* Valéry's (1946) *Mon Faust* (oeuvre inachevé); and Mann's (1947) novel, *Doktor Faustus.*

[3]*Faustbuch* (1587); Marlowe's (1588) play, *The tragical history of Dr. Faustus*

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